



California's New Approach to Land Use and Transportation Planning *Messaging Research & Tips on SB 375*

The following tips are based on research by Resource Media (in a 2009 report on the Strategic Growth Council and SB 375) and Action Media (in a 2004 report for the Funders' Network for Smart Growth).

Climate Change and Sprawl - Research indicates that voters are far more interested in the benefits of addressing climate change than in addressing global warming itself. Similarly, voters are concerned about the **impacts of sprawl** (long commutes, loss of farmland, etc.), but may not believe sprawl itself is bad for our communities.

Don't

- Talk about SB 375 as a solution to global warming.
- Identify sprawl as the problem. Despite its negative connotations, most people do not view "sprawl" as necessarily a bad thing—many consider it a form of progress.
- Talk about the planning process or how to achieve a result. Talk about the result itself.
- Use the term "co-benefits," but rather describe what they are in plain English (or Spanish).

Do

- Say that Californians are facing a number of problems as a result of poorly planned growth.
- Use examples of the impacts of sprawl -- hours and hours stuck in traffic jams, air pollution that makes our children sick, loss of farmland, etc. Also, use specific examples of individuals as much as possible -- eg, Sally from Los Angeles who spends nearly three hours each day stuck in traffic
- Talk about new development that will strengthen our communities (it's great to use specific examples of empty lots or abandoned buildings within our communities that are currently being wasted and suggest we take advantage of these opportunities).
- Remind people that development practices which draw on existing municipal resources and require less driving will help California communities use less energy and water, and protect our natural areas.
- Point out the wide range of benefits of smart growth – conservation of open space and farmland, improved air quality and health benefits, economic stability, neighborhood amenities like sidewalks and bike paths, more places to live that are affordable, new options for transportation, etc.

Transportation – Most voters express desire for a better public transportation system, but do not want to be told they should "spend less time driving" or "get out of their car."

Don't

- Use the roads vs. transit frame – talk about an efficient transportation system that provides choices.
- Talk about getting people out of their cars -- instead get them out of traffic.
- Use "transit dependent," but rather people who use transit.

Do

- Talk about giving commuters better choices.
- Talk about saving money at the gas pump and freeing ourselves from dependence on foreign oil.

Fairness and Choices - One value that resonates with many voters is the issue of fairness and the promise of a wide variety of options for homes and transportation.

Don't

- Say that "Smart Growth" is the way to go – people associate that with a movement that doesn't encourage choices but pushes one type of planning over another. It is viewed as very top-down.

Do

- Say, "The solution is to make better decisions about what, where and how to build next. When we make decisions about our future, we must look at all the available options, and make decisions on the basis of fairness and maximum benefit to the entire community."

- Talk about how working on Sustainable Communities Strategies is a way to look at the big picture. “We have an opportunity to get the communities around us working together on stubborn problems like traffic, getting homes to be within reach of the people who live and work here, saving open space, and taking care of our water.”

Targets - *It's easy for people who are very close to our issues to talk about targets in very technical terms. As much as possible, avoid discussions about the specifics of the process and focus on the results.*

Don't

- Initiate conversation about how a high target for GHG reduction is critical (unless you are at an RTAC meeting!). Even then, focus on the ways in which ambitious goals will improve our communities and Californians' daily lives.
- Talk about regional planning – most people do not associate themselves with a certain region; our sense of place is typically very localized.

Do

- Say that it's important that we set ambitious goals so we can build communities that include the neighborhood amenities that Californians deserve.
- Focus on the big picture – talk about how the overall goal is to provide communities with better choices for new homes and transportation systems.
- Mention the ways in which the old way of doing things led to poorly planned growth.

Sustainable Communities Strategies – *When talking about Sustainable Communities Strategies, focus on the opportunity it offers and the positive outcomes we're looking for.*

Don't

- Use the initials SCS.
- Don't get hung up on the process -- the mention of RTPs, MPOs, RHNA allocations, SCS, APS is enough to make most people's eyes glaze over. Focus instead on the outcomes - more housing and transportation choices.

Do

- Talk about the Sustainable Communities Strategy as a way for local communities to chart their own future.
- Mention the funding opportunities that will be directed toward communities that are taking action to reduce GHGs – examples include grants from the Strategic Growth Council, federal transportation funds, and future cap-and-trade revenues.

Places for People to Live – *Talk about homes and places for people to live, not “housing” – for many voters, the word “housing” has a negative connotation, and sounds abstract.*

Don't

- Use the term “affordable housing,” Instead say, “homes that people who live and work here can afford.”
- Use the term “density.” Density is a technical term appropriate for technical documents. Voters have a fairly positive reaction, however, to the term mixed-use.

Do

- Talk about homes that are safe, decent places for people to live that they can afford.
- Talk about choices – “Right now we have rules and policies that make it difficult to provide a variety of choices for people to live – we should increase the available options and do so in a way that's fair to the entire community.”
- Talk about supply and demand and the market.

Social Justice and Equity – *Talk about the importance of democracy and the importance of community engagement. Be specific about the inequity of the allocation of resources.*

Don't

- Talk about inequities or things that are unfair without defining them.

Do

- Talk about equality of opportunity – everyone deserves the opportunity for participation and prosperity, the opportunity to get to or live where good jobs are.